What are the ways to Build Intrinsic Motivation in Children?

Shared By Elizabeth Flanniken during visit to MINIS, Vietnam in 2024
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Examples compiled by Jessica Chua for MINIS internal guide 2025

You can force compliance, but not interest, motivation or engagement... therefore, coaching for long term impact is about intrinsic motivation, not external pressure.
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1. **Create an environment of encouragement and use the prepared environment to build children's motivation**
   Example: A shelf with neatly organized, developmentally appropriate materials that invite exploration, such as practical life trays, encourages independent work.
2. **Set achievable goals**
   Example: Ask a child to fold two small towels instead of an entire laundry basket.
3. **Define outcomes**
   Example: Before starting a plant-watering activity, explain the goal: “You’re helping this plant grow strong by giving it the right amount of water.”
4. **Let the child have a sense of accomplishment**
   Example: When a child completes a bead stringing activity, acknowledge it with, “You finished all the beads—you worked so carefully.”
5. **Let the child know about his success as well as improvements**
   Example: “You carried the tray so steadily today! Next time, try placing the cup right in the center.”
6. **Make tasks easier so the tasks can be achievable**
   Example: Offer a puzzle with fewer pieces before progressing to a more complex one.
7. **Extrinsic motivation like rewards and punishments need to be eliminated**
   Example: Instead of giving a sticker for finishing work, let the child feel proud internally by reflecting: “How did it feel to finish that puzzle all by yourself?”
8. **Give them goals that make an impact on the child**
   Example: Invite a child to help make snack for the class, so they see their contribution being enjoyed by others.
9. **Let the child have the freedom to choose**
   Example: Provide multiple practical life activities and let the child pick one.
10. **Set the child up for success**
    Example: Offer a sweeping activity with a child-sized broom and lightweight dustpan.

11. **Reduce dependency**
    Example: Show the child how to tie their apron, then let them try without stepping in unless asked.
12. **Let the children share their accomplishments as well as struggles**
    Example: In circle time, let children tell others what work they did that morning and what was difficult.
13. **The key is to know how to learn**
    Example: When the child struggles with buttoning, guide them step-by-step so they understand the process rather than rushing to help.
14. **Your feedback needs to be helpful**
    Example: "Next time, if you pour slowly, the water will stay in the cup."
15. **Be truthful to the children in your feedback**
    Example: Instead of saying "That's perfect!", say "I noticed you placed each spoon carefully next to the plate. That shows a lot of focus."
16. **Encourage children to work in a group**
    Example: Invite two children to do a large floor puzzle together, promoting collaboration.
17. **Make a group of children work toward a common goal**
    Example: Have a small group clean up the garden together to prepare it for planting.
18. **Let the child work on something greater than himself**
    Example: Let a child water the plants used by the whole class or arrange flowers for the shared space.
19. **Allow the child to be curious**
    Example: When a child asks about insects, provide magnifying glasses and insect cards to explore further.
20. **Let the child explore his environment**
    Example: Allow free movement and time during outdoor play for the child to collect leaves or watch ants.
21. **Make the child responsible for the work in the project**
    Example: Assign one child to prepare the hand-washing station each morning.
22. **Allow the child to set his own rules and goals**
    Example: "What order would you like to do your morning work in today?"
23. **Let a child take personal responsibility for his tasks**
    Example: After spilling rice during an activity, the child is guided to clean it up independently with the correct tools.
24. **Make a child work for community service (or any other group project) to see the impact and value of his work**
    Example: Let the child help in preparing thank-you cards for school helpers like janitors or kitchen staff.
25. **Provide choices**
    Example: "Would you like to do pouring or sorting today?"
26. **Avoid unnecessary interruptions while your child is working**
    Example: Avoid calling a child to snack when they are deeply focused on a matching game—wait until a natural pause.
27. **Let the child volunteer for different tasks**
    Example: Ask, "Who would like to set up snack today?" and allow children to step forward.

28. **Be patient with the child**
    Example: If the child is tying their shoe and taking time, silently observe and only help if they request it.
29. **Respect the child's boundaries**
    Example: If a child says they don't want to participate in group singing, allow them to watch quietly instead.
30. **Work together with the child as well**
    Example: Join a child in polishing a small table, modeling care and collaboration without taking over.
31. **Give them tasks with more visual impact like decorating a room or growing plants**
    Example: Let children plant seeds in clear containers so they can observe roots and leaves growing.
32. **Let the child learn at his own pace**
    Example: If a child is interested in sandpaper letters longer than expected, allow repeated practice without rushing to new content.
33. **Do not try to control the child**
    Example: Rather than directing exactly how to do an art project, provide materials and let the child create freely.
34. **Do not rush the child**
    Example: Give plenty of time for a child to put on their coat, even if it takes longer than an adult would need.
35. **Use encouragement over praise**
    Example: Say, "You kept trying even when it was tricky," rather than "Good job!"
36. **Offer help only when necessary or when they ask**
    Example: If a child is struggling to zip their coat, wait to see if they ask before stepping in.
37. **Accept disobedience as a part of intrinsic motivation**
    Example: If a child says no to an activity, consider it as them exercising autonomy rather than being defiant.
38. **Give the children an accepting environment**
    Example: Create a space where emotions are acknowledged: "It's okay to feel frustrated—would you like a break or some help?"
39. **Freedom within limits**
    Example: The child may choose their activity but knows to return it properly before choosing another.
40. **The process is more important than the product**
    Example: Focus on the child's effort during painting rather than the final picture.
41. **Solve the problems together**
    Example: If two children argue over a material, guide them to find a fair solution: "How can we make this work for both of you?"
42. **Be the role model of intrinsic motivation for the child**
    Example: Show your own interest in learning by sharing when you're reading a book or working on a task, saying, "I'm enjoying figuring this out."